

William Cashman Ferguson
19 November 1861—3 June 1930

NORMAN TAYLOR

In the summer of 1917 a man already distinguished in one science took the first step towards becoming the most distinguished amateur on Long Island in a second. From a casual inquiry as to the identity of some weeds he found on the grounds of the Garden City Golf Club there ripened an interest that led Mr. Ferguson to gather the finest amateur herbarium in existence of Long Island plants.

It was my privilege to guide him in his early botanical studies, and ultimately to be guided by him in the determination of difficult Long Island specimens in such genera as *Salix*, *Panicum*, the sedges, and many other groups in which he became quite extraordinarily proficient. Entering botany late in life, he brought to it a trained mind, finely polished by years of work in analytical chemistry. For he was a leading authority in copper smelting, chief chemist of the Nichols Copper Company, and later consulting chemist for the General Chemical Company.

By inclination an investigator, he early rebelled against the commercial sphere into which his father had started him, entered Columbia University at 22 and graduated in 1887. During these years he came in touch with Doctor Britton, who was then dividing his time at Columbia between geology and botany. Years later as Mr. Ferguson's interest in botany grew, that friendship was renewed.

He opened a wide correspondence with various botanists and institutions, and, as his herbarium increased, generously deposited duplicate specimens of his rarer finds. Hundreds of them naturally were given to the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, but large collections were sent to the Gray Herbarium, to Albany, and to the New York Botanical Garden. He took a keen interest in my work on the flora of Long Island, spending many hours checking records for it, collecting specimens, and doing all his ample leisure in the later years would permit.

His carefully prepared herbarium, notebooks, lists, etc., he left to the New York Botanical Garden, together with a sum of money for their care. He had published several critical articles on the specimens he found on Long Island, and other lists were in prepa-

ration at his death. No adequate Flora of Long Island can ever be written without a careful checking of the Ferguson herbarium, and of his catalog notes on it.

It is almost impossible to speak with restraint of the personal characteristics of the man. Quite apart from his chemical and botanical knowledge he had wide interests. His library was rich in Victorian literature, and, more especially, in books on big game hunting, mountain climbing, and biographies of explorers.

I often thought of him as a modern, thoroughly successful Colonel Newcome. Like his prototype he had almost fierce loyalties, a punctilious sense of honor, distinguished consideration for his inferiors, and a good deal of impatience with pretense.

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